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SHAKESPEARE
IN THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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SHAKESPEARE
IN THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY
DAVID NICHOL SMITH



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THESE three lectures were delivered in Birkbeck College, London, in November 1927, on the invitation of the Principal and my old friend Mr. J. H. Lobban.

In preparing them for the printer I have thought it best to retain their original form, but I have added footnotes.

D. N. S.

MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD

January 1928

I

MY subject is 'Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century'. What was his reputation then, and how have the critics, and the scholars, and the actors of that age contributed to his fame? I shall not keep within the strict chronological limits of this century. Its work was so important, so copious, and as a whole so distinct in character that I shall find no temptation in three lectures to come beyond the year 1800; but I cannot so easily ignore the years which had intervened since Shakespeare's death.

At no time since his death has Shakespeare not been placed upon a pinnacle by himself as the greatest of all English writers. But each age has its own point of view, its own interests, its characteristic method of treatment, and no age can ever say the last word on anything that has a living and life-giving force. Say the last word on Shakespeare, and Shakespeare is dead. There can never be finality in the criticism of a great author. The truth and the beauty embodied in his work exercise the taste and the acumen of one critic, and remain undiminished and untarnished for the next. All the best criticism of the present day, all the best criticism that has ever been written,

cannot reveal all the secrets of him who is the supreme spokesman of human experience. When we have done our utmost our successors will begin again for themselves. We may add to the stock of knowledge about Shakespeare. We may clear away many misapprehensions. We may throw light on dark places. But Shakespeare, all that is vital in him, remains a munificent patrimony for each new generation to enjoy as it wills.

I would illustrate this by what we know of ourselves. We read one of Shakespeare's plays and are familiar with it. We read it a second time and discover something in it that we did not see before, and each time we read it, no matter how often, we invariably find something new. We may edit it and write learned notes, we may commit it to memory and act it, but whenever we bring to it a fresh and alert mind we are repaid by a sense of novelty and an unexpected wealth of meaning. To a certain degree a characteristic of all great art is that it is impossible to say that there is no other painter, no poet, no musician who provides us with the same extent with the same experience. Now when we read a play of Shakespeare's for the twentieth time and discover something new, even in familiar passages, we are apt to think that our first readings must have been careless or even blind. Presumably we now *know* the play better. On the

other hand, we may at the first reading have seen some things a little more clearly than we do now, or appreciated others a little more keenly.

It is well to bear this in mind when we consider the main phases of Shakespeare's reputation. Each age tends to belittle its predecessor's appreciation of him. The sense of discovery, the glow that comes on entering into what we take to be the full meaning, makes us doubt if others have seen what we see, and felt what we feel. Discovery is necessary to true appreciation, and we have always to make the discovery for ourselves. Whenever there is a compelling sense of power, or beauty, that we cannot wholly grasp, the discovery has been made. In this sense every age has discovered Shakespeare, and will continue to discover him.

It is sometimes said that Shakespeare was not properly appreciated in his own day. But the greatest eulogy that was ever written of a contemporary was written on Shakespeare by his fellow dramatist, Ben Jonson. It is the poem 'To the memory of my beloved, The Author Mr. William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us', prefixed to the first collected edition of Shakespeare's works, the First Folio, published in 1623. Shakespeare is addressed as

Soule of the Age!

The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!

He has outshone all his fellows; he has surpassed all the greatest dramatists of ancient times—Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Seneca, in tragedy; as for comedy, there is no comparison between him and

all that insolent Greece or haughtie Rome
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.

.
The merry *Greeke*, tart *Aristophanes*,
Neat *Terence*, witty *Plautus*, now not please,
But antiquated, and deserted lye
As they were not of Natures family.

These Greek and Latin dramatists had been Jonson's own masters. They were antiquated. But of Shakespeare he has to say that

He was not of an age, but for all time.

Is there anywhere another eulogy like this?

Contemporaries, and fellow craftsmen in particular, have a keen eye for shortcomings. There were many little carelessnesses that had struck Ben Jonson in Shakespeare's work. His unmatched facility had often betrayed him. In the heat of the moment he had written much that was not quite proof against cold scrutiny. Jonson had spoken of these carelessnesses, and in his private papers he remarked on them. These jottings in a common-place book—and they are nothing more—were afterwards published in his *Discoveries*, and

there we read that Shakespeare many times fell into those things that could not escape laughter: 'As when hee said in the person of *Cæsar*, one speaking to him; *Cæsar thou dost me wrong*. Hee replyed: *Cæsar did never wrong, but with just cause*: and such like; which were ridiculous.' Whether or not this is ridiculous, is a question. The passage as we find it in the First Folio reads thus:

Know, *Cæsar* doth not wrong, nor without cause
Will he be satisfied.¹

Perhaps this is an emended reading, and perhaps the emendation had been made in answer to such criticism as Jonson's. But one point is clear: Jonson thought that Shakespeare's chief shortcomings were of the kind that can be easily removed on revision. When he heard Shakespeare praised for having 'never blotted out line', he used to reply 'would he had blotted a thousand'. He writes this down in his common-place book. But he also says there, 'I lov'd the man, and doe honour his memory (on this side Idolatry) as much as any.'

At the end of the seventeenth century we find something of the spirit of Jonson's observations, and something of their substance, in the critical essays of Dryden. Much had happened in the interval. After Shakespeare's death the drama had

¹ *Julius Caesar*, III. i. 47, 8. The broken line supports the case for emendation.

steadily declined. Then came the Civil Wars, and the theatres were shut, and remained shut till the Restoration. The drama could not begin again where it had left off. The older traditions had been weakened, if not broken, by the silence of eighteen years, and during these years another kind of drama had been coming to its full power in France. The period immediately after the Restoration was in dramatic practice, as in so much else, a period of uncertainty and experiment, and when Dryden began to write for the theatre he was confronted with the problem how a play ought to be written. Ought it to conform in structure to the methods of the ancient drama, or the French drama, or the English drama, and ought the verse to be rhymed or unrhymed? Dryden has to think out all these questions for himself, and he thinks them out on paper—he writes his essay *Of Dramatick Poesie*, which remains to this day one of the greatest examples of thinking on paper in all English literature. In this essay he breaks the thread of his argument to say what he thinks about the greater Elizabethans, and this is what he says of Shakespeare:

To begin then with *Shakespeare*; he was the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the Images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously,

but luckily: when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learn'd; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature; he look'd inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is every where alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of Mankind. He is many times flat, insipid; his Comick wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into Bombast. But he is alwayes great, when some great occasion is presented to him: no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of Poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.

The consideration of this made Mr. *Hales* of *Eaton* say, That there was no subject of which any Poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better treated of in *Shakespeare* . . .

This great passage contains in essence, as we shall see, what the critics were to say for the next hundred years.

Dryden's censure of Shakespeare's faults reminds us of what Ben Jonson had said of them. It is developed in some of his later essays.

He saw more clearly than we can, and perhaps with illusive clearness, the changes in social habits and in ordinary speech that had taken place during the sixty years since Shakespeare wrote his plays; and he thought that these changes were improve-

ments, refinements. So in a huffing epilogue meant to flatter his audience he had said:

They who have best succeeded on the Stage,
Have still conform'd their Genius to their Age . . .
If Love and Honour now are higher rais'd,
'Tis not the Poet, but the Age is prais'd.
Wit's now arriv'd to a more high degree;
Our native Language more refin'd and free;
Our Ladies and our Men now speak more wit
In conversation, than those Poets writ.

Taken to task for this epilogue, he wrote in its defence *An Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age*, in which he maintained that the language of the Elizabethans was often incorrect or mean, and that their wit was unrefined:

I have always acknowledged the wit of our predecessors, with all the veneration which becomes me; but I am sure their wit was not that of gentlemen; there was ever somewhat that was ill-bred and clownish in it, and which confessed the conversation of the authors.

In a later essay, his *Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*, he says, speaking of Shakespeare in particular:

I cannot deny that he has his failings; but they are not so much in the passions themselves, as in his manner of expression: he often obscures his meaning by his words, and sometimes makes it unintelligible. I will not say of so great a Poet, that he distinguish'd not the blown puffy stile, from true sublimity; but I may venture to maintain that the fury of his fancy often transported him, beyond

the bounds of Judgment, either in coyning of new words and phrases, or racking words which were in use, into the violence of a Catachresis.

Here Dryden is repeating in his own way what Ben Jonson had said. He goes on to show that Shakespeare's style was liable to be extravagantly figurative, to present us with an excess of metaphor, or simile, or image. ' 'Tis neither height of thought that is discommended,' he says, 'nor pathetic vehemence, nor any nobleness of expression in its proper place; but 'tis a false measure of all these.' And then he adds:

If *Shakespear* were stript of all the Bombast in his passions, and dress'd in the most vulgar words, we should find the beauties of his thoughts remaining; if his embroideries were burnt down, there would still be silver at the bottom of the melting-pot: but I fear (at least, let me fear it for my self) that we who ape his sounding words, have nothing of his thought, but are all out-side; there is not so much as a dwarf within our giants cloaths. Therefore, let not *Shakespear* suffer for our sakes; 'tis our fault, who succeed him in an Age which is more refin'd, if we imitate him so ill, that we copy his failings only, and make a virtue of that in our Writings, which in his was an imperfection.

This is neither unreasonable nor immodest. There is censure, but there is no lack of veneration.

These were the faults that Dryden found in Shakespeare; and he laid the blame for them on)

the Elizabethan age. Rightly or wrongly he was satisfied that his England was more refined than Shakespeare's. Certainly there had been a marked rise in the general standard of comfort, and a steady increase in the numbers of the reading public. The rise of the middle classes, and all that it means, dates from this time. Dryden tells us again and again that he is living in a new age. No other great English author shows so persistently so clear a sense of the changing conditions and habits in the life around him. When he is an old man, in the very last lines that he wrote, he exults in the thought that the new age of his early manhood is to be followed by another new age, and a better one. He has an unrelenting belief in progress. The men may not be greater, but the conditions are better. He was as conscious of the difference between his age and Shakespeare's as we are of the difference between ourselves and the Victorians. But unlike some of us he spoke of the older men as giants:

Our Age was cultivated thus at length,
But what we gain'd in Skill we lost in Strength.
Our Builders were with Want of Genius curst;
The second Temple was not like the first.

The gradual process of refinement, as he took it to be, seemed to have thrown some of Shakespeare's shortcomings, or rather excesses, into

strong relief. But of Shakespeare's supremacy he had never any doubt: .

But spite of all his pride, a secret shame
Invades his Breast at *Shakespear's* sacred name:
Aw'd when he hears his Godlike *Romans* rage,
He in a just despair would quite the Stage;
And to an Age less polish'd, more unskill'd,
Does with disdain the foremost Honours yield.

It is not to be thought that Dryden, who was by nature always an experimenter, condemned the structure of Shakespeare's plays. That censure he left to other critics. He was ready on occasion to write a play on the French model, or he would try a new kind of play of his own devising, but one of the points which emerge clearly from his criticism of Shakespeare is that the character drawing, the passions, and the poetry are of more account in a just drama than the structure. Therein Dryden was strictly in the English tradition.

But Thomas Rymer was not. He was entirely out of sympathy with the modern drama, French as well as English. Still he was a hearty Englishman, and was convinced that the English could have excelled in tragedy if they had set the right way about it. '*The English*', he says, 'want neither *genius* nor *language* for so great a work. And, certainly, had our Authors began with Tragedy, as *Sophocles* and *Euripides* left it; had they either

built on the same foundation, or after their *model*; we might e're this day have seen Poetry in greater perfection, and boasted such *Monuments* of wit as *Greece* or *Rome* never knew in all their *glory*.' ¹ This may remind us of what Milton had recently said in his note before *Samson Agonistes*. Rymer was a learned man, one of the most learned men of his time. His *Fœdera*, a collection in many massive folio volumes of the public conventions of Great Britain, is known to every historian. But his ventures in literary criticism, *The Tragedies of The last Age Consider'd and Examin'd by the Practice of the Ancients, and by the Common sense of all Ages* (1678), and his *Short View of Tragedy, It's Original, Excellency, and Corruption* (1693), took him out of his element, though it must in justice be added that these books likewise give evidence of his learning. They have the air of having been written as a relaxation from severer studies, and they are far from dull reading. This highly opinionative, contradictory antiquary had a bluff and breezy humour. He asks why *Othello* was not called the 'Tragedy of the Handkerchief'. There is not a handkerchief in all the plays of Sophocles; then why is there a handkerchief in *Othello*, and why is 'so remote a trifle' given so important a function? Presumably the moral

¹ *The Tragedies of The last Age*, 1678, p. 11.

must be connected with it somehow; so he suggested that 'this may be a warning to all good Wives, that they look well to their Linnen'. After pages of this boisterous fooling, all carried on in the name of common sense, we come on this sober final verdict:

There is in this Play, some burlesk, some humour, and ramble of Comical Wit, some shew, and some *Mimickry* to divert the spectators: but the tragical part is, plainly none other, than a Bloody Farce, without salt or savour.¹

This is not the language of a responsible leader of a serious party. Pope once called Rymer one of our best critics, but only because of his learning. It was, I believe, only his learning that made him be heard, and the prominence which he justly enjoyed as Historiographer-Royal. Dryden began by treating him with respect, and spoke of him as 'my friend Mr. Rymer'. But Rymer had also written a tragedy in illustration of how a tragedy ought to be written; and when in his second book, the *Short View*, he made his deliberate attack on Shakespeare, the time had passed for Dryden to withhold his comments:

To *Shakespeare's* Critique he bequeaths the Curse,
To find his faults; and yet himself make worse;
A precious Reader in Poetique Schools,
Who by his own Examples damns his Rules.²

¹ *Short View*, 1693, p. 146.

² Prologue to *Love Triumphant*, 1694.

I quote this passage because of the false importance which has sometimes been attached to the frequent mention of dramatic rules in the criticism of this time. Here we have Dryden making fun of Rymer's 'rules'; and no rules did he think binding. He was a restless genius who desired to prove all things. At times he might write a play according to 'the exactest rules by which a play is wrought', but the one rule to which he invariably subscribed, the first and great rule on which hang all the others, was that any method can be justified by success. 'Better a mechanic rule were stretched or broken', he says, 'than a great beauty were omitted.' More than this, he challenged the rules, he impugned them at what he took to be their source. Assuming, like every one else at the time, that they were to be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*, he questioned Aristotle's right to legislate for us. He never suspected that Aristotle did not legislate even for the Greek drama, and had only made observations on it. In any case he was satisfied that Aristotle had no conception of the whole movement of modern literature. In his projected reply to Rymer's first book he had therefore jotted down this remark:

'Tis not enough that Aristotle has said so, for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and

Euripides; and if he had seen ours, might have changed his mind.¹

The greater critics of this time agree with Dryden about the rules. 'There is more beauty', said Addison, 'in the works of a great genius who is ignorant of the rules of art, than in those of a little genius who knows and observes them.'²

Some drily plain, without Invention's aid,
Write dull *Receipts* how Poems may be made,

said Pope. It was the crabbed men and the little men, the Rymers and Dick Minims, who exalted the 'rules'; and they were satirized for it. We must not mistake them for representative critics. If we are right in judging other periods by the best work, rather than the second-rate, or the worst, we had better judge this period by its best work too; and if we confine our attention to what its great men said about Shakespeare, we who can boast of wider and more detailed knowledge may begin to doubt if we can claim pre-eminence in appreciation.

We shall have a lower opinion of this period if

¹ *Works*, ed. Scott and Saintsbury, xv, p. 390; Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, Dryden, *ad fin.*, ed. G. B. Hill, i, p. 474.

² *The Spectator*, No. 592, 10 September 1714. What follows recalls Dryden: 'Our inimitable *Shakespear* is a Stumbling-block to the whole Tribe of these rigid Criticks. Who would not rather read one of his Plays, where there is not a single Rule of the Stage observed, than any Production of a modern Critick, where there is not one of them violated?'

we judge it by the theatrical representations. But these are always a dangerous criterion. If in the future we are to be judged by what some theatre managers have provided for our entertainment, there is no saying what may be thought of us. The new versions of Shakespeare's plays may be divided roughly into three classes. There are the adaptations which are indefensible, of no interest save as awful examples of what can be produced by irresponsible tinkering. There are others which are regrettable, but of considerable historical interest because of their honest and misguided endeavour to remove a supposed blemish and to make the play suit better the new conditions and the new taste. And there are others which, though suggested by Shakespeare's, or based on his, are in fact independent and original dramas. The great representative of this third class is Dryden's *All for Love*. In this play Dryden did not attempt to improve upon Shakespeare. He was, let me repeat, always an experimenter. Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* deals with a long series of years—it is a chronicle play on a Roman instead of an English subject—and the scene is the Mediterranean, the civilized world. What could be made of this great story according to the methods of an entirely different type of drama—the type which was then at its perfection in France

—the type which made the action of the play extend not over a long series of years but only over twenty-four hours, and confined the action to one single place? Here was a task to put the experimenter on his mettle. Allowed only one day, he chose the last day in the lives of Antony and Cleopatra; and his conception, or rather his presentation, of the character of Antony depended entirely on this choice. From the start his Antony is, must be, a ruined man. We have no opportunity of seeing him bear his honours thick upon him. We hear that he was once ‘so great, so happy, so beloved’ that even Fate seemed powerless to ruin him, but when we first meet him he is hopelessly in the toils of Fate. The fires have burned out, and he is the ember of his passionate compelling manhood. It is a sadder, more sombre play than Shakespeare’s. It is never lit up with the noontide splendour of the Egyptian sun. The sun is setting, and setting rapidly, and the air hangs heavy. Now when you give yourself the task of turning Shakespeare’s gorgeous chronicle play into a regular tragedy, when you have to content yourself with but a small portion of the multifarious matter that the looser and more comprehensive framework requires, when you have to depict character as revealed not by a series of events spread over many years but by a situation

on a particular day, and when you have to adopt a new colour scheme throughout because the fatal issue is impending from the beginning, I do not know how you can succeed better than Dryden did. We shall all prefer Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* to Dryden's *All for Love*, though it is well to remember that Sir Walter Scott had his doubts. But *All for Love* is, at the very least, a triumph of craftsmanship. It is not so much an adaptation as an original play, suggested by Shakespeare's, and not by Shakespeare's alone. As Dryden said in his Preface, to write a drama on the death of Antony and Cleopatra was to try the bow of Ulysses amongst a crowd of suitors; and, as has recently been pointed out, he had read to some purpose the *Cleopatra* of Samuel Daniel.¹

Of the plays which can strictly be called adaptations or new versions I will mention only two, each a representative of one of the other classes that I have endeavoured to distinguish. The travelling player in *The Vicar of Wakefield* tells Dr. Primrose that Fletcher, Ben Jonson, and all the plays of Shakespeare are 'the only things that go down', and when the doctor expresses his astonishment the player replies that the public 'only go to be amused, and find themselves happy when they can

¹ See 'Some Notes on Dryden', by G. Thorn-Drury, *Review of English Studies*, January 1925, p. 79.

enjoy a pantomime under the sanction of Jonson's or Shakespeare's name'. We are tempted to consider the Restoration version of *The Tempest* as an early instance of this kind of entertainment. The public craved for variety of incidents and situation—and this is how they got it. Caliban was given a sister. It was not enough that there should be only one woman who had never seen a man: Miranda also was given a sister. And this was not enough. What of a man who had never seen a woman? 'By this means', it was thought, 'those two characters of innocence and love might the more illustrate and commend each other.' This adaptation we can only regret. It was planned and in part written and wholly revised by Sir William Davenant, then an oldish man, and Dryden, then a young man, assisted him and apparently wrote most of it. When it was published shortly after Davenant's death, Dryden added the Preface, describing how they had collaborated, and recording his pleasure in having been thus associated with the leading dramatist of the day, whose 'imaginations were such as could not easily enter into any other man'. He had also written the Prologue, and there he had confessed to a sense of the futility of competing with Shakespeare:

! But *Shakespear's* Magick could not copy'd be;
Within that Circle none durst walk but he.

The alteration of *King Lear* by Nahum Tate requires more serious treatment, for it was made, not with an eye to the amusement of the audience, but from a genuine desire to improve the original, which was thought to resemble 'a heap of jewels, unstrung and unpolished, yet dazzling in their disorder'. Argue about it as we will—and the arguments are conclusively on the side of Shakespeare—there will always be those who feel that the ending of *King Lear* is needlessly painful. It is right that Macbeth should suffer, and Hamlet, and Othello; but Lear, that innocent old man whose only fault was his folly, why should he relentlessly be done to death by the cruelty of his daughters, and pass out of life without some respite from suffering, and in a dotage which denied him a glimpse of the goodness in this world? Tate therefore gave the play a happy ending. He restored Lear to his kingdom, and—stock element in a happy ending—he gave the heroine a husband. This gift entailed serious alterations. The husband was Edgar, and he and Cordelia never exchange a word in the original. Love scenes were therefore introduced throughout. Indeed, if we may believe the Preface, it was the love scenes that Tate thought of first, and the happy ending followed as a natural climax. ' 'Twas my good Fortune', he says, 'to light on one Expedient to rectifie what

was wanting in the Regularity and Probability of the Tale, which was to run through the whole a Love betwixt Edgar and Cordelia. . . . This Method necessarily threw me on making the Tale conclude in a Success to the innocent distressed Persons.' It also threw him on omitting the Fool. Tate appears to have regarded the Fool as a senseless jester whose only function was to amuse the theatre-goers of an unrefined age; he could not have recognized the deep significance of the artful prattle.

For the omission of the Fool and the introduction of love scenes there is nothing to be said. And I propose to say nothing about the restoration of Lear and the felicity of Cordelia. The last word on this *unhappy* ending was said by Charles Lamb, in words which, after all, are little more than a splendid amplification of Shakespeare's:

he hates him

That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer.

I would only remind you that Samuel Johnson was so shocked by Cordelia's death and the denial of justice that for many years he could not endure to read the last scenes as Shakespeare wrote them, till he had to read them when preparing his edition.

It will be more to our purpose to sketch briefly

the stage history of *King Lear* throughout the eighteenth century, and incidentally to illustrate the liberties which then, as at all times, were taken by actors and theatre managers.

Tate's version held the stage unchallenged till the time of Garrick, and Garrick's version, which was produced in 1756, held the stage for another sixty years. What Garrick did was to adapt Tate's adaptation. He brought back many of Shakespeare's lines and cut out many of Tate's, but he retained the love scenes and the happy ending. In the main he left the play much as he had found it. He had not the courage to restore the Fool, and indeed it may be doubted if he appreciated the part; he feared that 'the feelings of Lear would derive no advantage from the buffooneries of the parti-coloured jester'.¹

Colman saw that Garrick had not gone far enough, and in his version, produced in 1768, endeavoured 'to purge the tragedy of Lear of the alloy of Tate'. He would have none of the love scenes; but he approved of an ending which enforced the moral that 'there are gods, and virtue is their care'. He made Lear 'a king again', but he did not marry Cordelia to Edgar. Roughly we may say that in the first four acts he worked directly on the text of Shakespeare, making many cuts and

¹ Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies*, 1783, ii, p. 267.

not a few patches, whereas in the fifth act he based his version largely on Tate's. He thought of retaining the Fool (his use of the word 'retaining', not 'restoring', would of itself show that he used the original), but concluded reluctantly that such a character 'would sink into burlesque in the representation, and would not be endured on the modern stage'.¹ Colman took credit to himself, and rightly, for the best version that had yet appeared in the eighteenth-century theatre. But it was not a success and was never revived. *The Dramatic Censor* called for 'a third alteration upon medium principles, between the latitude of Tate and the circumscription of Colman'.¹ The problem of the theatre managers then, as now, was to make the old plays hit the popular taste, and this critic argued that an adaptation could hit it only if a chance was given to the actresses. 'Every alterer of Shakespeare should remember', he says, 'there were no female performers in his days, and improve according to the present time such parts as necessity, not want of genius or knowledge, made him abbreviate.'² In this sentence we have the

¹ 'Utter improbability' in the representation was his reason for omitting 'without scruple' Gloucester's leap from Dover Cliff, but 'the celebrated description of the cliff' was retained. The blinding of Gloucester was made to take place off the stage.

² *The Dramatic Censor*, 1770, i, pp. 360, 368.

explanation of too much in the history of Shakespeare on the modern stage. Tate had seen the need of love scenes, and Garrick too; Colman cut them out, and failed.

Throughout the whole of the eighteenth century, and till 1823, *King Lear* had a happy ending on the stage. In 1820 Kean, who had followed Garrick's version, was reported to have said that 'he was very much obliged to the London audiences for the good opinion they had hitherto expressed of him, but that when they came to see him over the dead body of Cordelia, they would have quite a different notion of the matter';¹ and three years later, in agreement at once with his ambitions as an actor and with the wishes of Lamb and Hazlitt, he gave the play its true ending. His reforms, which were dictated by his own opportunities, did not extend to the whole of the play, for Tate's love scenes were retained,² and the Fool was still excluded. Not till 1838 did the Fool come to his own again. The actor who had the courage to restore him was Macready. He, too, had his

¹ Hazlitt, *The London Magazine*, June 1820 (ed. Waller and Glover, viii, p. 444).

² Cf. *The New Monthly Magazine*, 1823, ix, p. 108: 'This change will, no doubt, prepare the way for the restoration of the play from the beginning; for now all the love making between Edgar and Cordelia "which with its darkness dares affront the light" of Shakespeare, is now utterly useless.'

doubts, which he resolved by giving the part to a youthful actress. The Fool is a poor frail piece of humanity, but he has a man's experience of life.

The main conclusion that we have to draw from all this is that we must be very careful in judging the taste of an age by the stage productions of a dramatist who is not a contemporary. Do not let us forget that Coleridge and Hazlitt and Lamb never saw *King Lear* acted as written by Shakespeare. I cannot think that our successors a hundred years hence will get us quite right if they take some recent costly productions of the London theatres as the true measure of our appreciation. When we speak with amused contempt of the Restoration travesty of *The Tempest*, let us remember what a critic said about a recent production of that play; it ought, he said, to have been called 'The Girl from Prospero's Island'.

Condemn the bad work of the eighteenth century as we like, and as we must, there are, I fear, some points in which we cannot claim superiority. Shakespeare was regularly acted then. Not a year passed but several of his plays were produced on the two chief London stages, Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields or Covent Garden. In the year of *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) the ordinary playgoer could have seen *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Henry IV* (both parts), *The Merry Wives*, *Richard*

III, Henry VIII, and Julius Caesar, and about the same time also, *Measure for Measure, Timon of Athens, and The Tempest*. In the year of *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) the list is even longer—*Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, Richard III, Henry V, Henry VIII, Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, Much Ado, Twelfth Night, The Tempest, and Cymbeline*. Every great actor from Betterton to Garrick, and from Garrick to Kean, made his name by acting Shakespeare. Nowadays a popular favourite may announce that he, or she, is to make the experiment of appearing in a Shakespearian role, but in the eighteenth century every actor who had won fame in his profession, or aspired to it, had several of Shakespeare's characters in his repertory. The ordinary man who made a habit of going to the theatre had, as a consequence, a wider knowledge of Shakespeare than the corresponding man can boast to-day. For our knowledge we are very little indebted to the stage. We are much more indebted to our educational system and, if the truth must be spoken, to the 'machinery of examinations. What Shakespeare himself would have thought of this we may well wonder. And do not let us take too great credit to ourselves because we study him in good texts, whereas a hundred or two hundred years ago our ancestors saw him acted in

bad versions. In these versions as a rule it was the minor parts that suffered. Hamlet, Othello, Iago, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Falstaff—all the great persons of the Shakespearian drama were known to the playgoer, and were his familiar acquaintances.¹

During this time the scholars and the critics were at work, helping us towards a good text and a reasoned appreciation. Of them I have still to speak.

¹ At the Stratford celebrations in September 1769 there was to have been a 'pageant or representation of all Shakespeare's characters', but it had to be abandoned on account of the weather. Two plates in illustration of the 'procession of Shakespeare's characters' will be found in *The Oxford Magazine* for September and October 1769.

II

I HAVE spoken of the performances of Shakespeare's plays on the eighteenth-century stage. I turn to the scholars, to the men who endeavoured to establish the text of these plays, explained their difficulties as far as they could, and told us what they had discovered about them and their author. The subject is somewhat technical, but the main lines in the development of Shakespearian scholarship at this time are clear. As we might expect, there is no other single author in the editorial treatment of whose work we find so true and full illustration of the general progress of English studies.

In the seventeenth century there were four collected editions of Shakespeare's works, the four Folios. The First Folio, brought out by Heminge and Condell in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, contained thirty-six plays, for twenty of which it is the sole authority, the other sixteen having already been printed in Quartos of varying value. The edition consisted of perhaps a thousand copies,¹ and was soon exhausted. The Second Folio, published in 1632, was reprinted from the First, generally column for column; but the printer's reader tried to straighten out what

¹ See W. W. Greg, 'The First Folio and its Publishers', in *Studies in the First Folio*, 1924, pp. 155, 156.

he thought was crooked, and introduced emendations of his own free will. Malone called this reader, or group of readers, the editor, and called him also one of 'the two great corrupters of our poet's text' (the other, as we shall see, was Pope) because 'he always cuts a knot instead of untying it'.¹ The Second Folio in turn was used as the basis of the Third, which appeared in 1663 and 1664, and corruption in the name of correction continued its progress. The Fourth Folio of 1685 carried the corruption one stage farther; it was printed from the Third, with printing-house improvements. No one at this time gave any thought to the authority of the First Folio. We must not blame them—not even the authorities of the Bodleian Library who sold for a pittance their well-thumbed copy of the First Folio when they became possessed of a clean copy of the Third. They thought, as we are asked to think, that the last edition is the best. The idea of going back to an out-of-date edition of a popular book does not normally occur to a mere publisher, and those seventeenth-century Folios were publishers' editions, printed to supply a steady demand. The typography may have improved, but at each stage the text receded from the original.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the

¹ Malone's *Shakespeare*, 1790, i, xix and v, p. 568.

time had come for a new edition, and the fashion of the portly Folio had then passed? It was issued in six handy yet handsome octavo volumes; and it was the first edition to be edited in the modern sense, that is to say it was not left in the hands of the printer's readers, but was superintended by one of the leading writers of the day, who furnished an introduction, and whose name was on the title-page. This editor was Nicholas Rowe, afterwards Poet Laureate, and his qualification was that he was a successful dramatist, the chief writer of tragedy in the reign of Queen Anne. He approached his task as a dramatist, and, treating Shakespeare's plays much as he would have treated his own, furnished lists of the *dramatis personae*, stated where the scene was laid, and added stage directions. He based his text on the Fourth Folio, and made such emendations here and there as readily occurred to him on a leisurely perusal. Some are right, some are plausible, some are wrong. In other words, he continued the methods of the seventeenth-century proof-readers. A good instance—I might say the stock instance—of what had happened since 1623 is afforded by a line in the *Comedy of Errors*:

Antipholus my husband,
Whom I made Lord of me, and all I had,
At your important Letters. (v. i. 138.)

‘Important’ in the First Folio; but misprinted ‘impoteant’ in the Second Folio, and in some copies ‘impotent’; ‘impotent’ it remains in the Third Folio and the Fourth; but Rowe saw that ‘impotent’ gives the opposite meaning to what is required, and altered it to ‘all-potent’. It is an arm-chair method of editing. Rowe knew, however, what he ought to do. He writes thus in the Dedication:

I must not pretend to have restor’d this Work to the Exactness of the Author’s Original Manuscripts: Those are lost, or, at least, are gone beyond any Inquiry I could make; so that there was nothing left, but to compare the several Editions, and give the true Reading as well as I could from thence. This I have endeavour’d to do pretty carefully, and render’d very many Places Intelligible, that were not so before.

Well said, but not well done. If his performance had been as good as his programme we should not now have had to say that his edition is negligible by all except those who are interested in the history of Shakespeare’s text. None the less, Rowe was the first to turn back to the original editions. In the play of *Henry V* there are more than twenty passages where he has restored the reading of the First or Second Folio; and there are other passages in this play where he gives the reading, not of a Folio, but of a Quarto. In *King Lear* his use of one of the Quartos is unquestionable. We can-

not say with the first Cambridge editors that 'it is almost certain that he did not take the trouble to refer to, much less to collate, any of the previous Folios or Quartos',¹ an emphatic assertion which is at unfortunate variance with Rowe's own statement. Rowe was wrong in saying that he had compared the several editions 'pretty carefully'. He was far from careful. He certainly did not collate. But he certainly consulted the First or Second Folio occasionally when he found a difficulty, and by so doing he did render, as he claims, many places intelligible.

His edition has the further interest of containing by way of introduction our first life of Shakespeare, which remained the standard biography till the time of Malone. It preserves for us some floating traditions, which may or may not be false; but for Rowe they might have perished.

The next editor was Pope. With all his manifest shortcomings he made a great advance on Rowe. I doubt if justice has been done to him as an

¹ This statement occurs in the Preface written by Clark and Glover and published in 1863. Aldis Wright had no hand in this Preface, but he reprinted it in the later editions of the Cambridge Shakespeare, unfortunately without any indication that it contained some things with which his greater knowledge of the history of Shakespeare's text and his greater scholarship would not allow him to agree.—Johnson had said in his *Life of Rowe* that in Rowe's edition 'without the pomp of notes or boasts of criticism, many passages are happily restored'.

editor, even though by all modern standards, and the later eighteenth-century standard, he had a wrong idea of his duties. If Rowe approached his task with the equipment of a dramatist, Pope approached it in the spirit of a literary executor. When he turned to his Shakespeare he had just prepared for the press the Poems of his friend Parnell, and while engaged on it he enjoyed a short respite in overlooking the handsome edition of the Works of the Duke of Buckinghamshire. Literary executorship is the very worst preparation for an edition of a great English classic. The problems are entirely different. What has an executor to do with a series of papers that are not quite ready for the press? He is disloyal to the memory of his friend if he perpetuates the little blemishes which his friend would undoubtedly have removed; and if he hits on a happy little alteration which he is convinced his friend would have at once adopted, a rearrangement of words, or the omission of a clumsy or obscure phrase, he may not be the trusty friend that he was expected to be if he stays his hand. Now Shakespeare's papers had not been left ready for press, and the players who published them in 1623, and the subsequent editors or printer's readers, had scamped their work. Pope saw, as clearly as we do, that it was the duty of an editor to go back to the beginning.

He used Rowe's edition for the basis of his text. The 'copy' which he sent to the press was Rowe's printed pages (probably of the second edition, 1714). But they were heavily corrected. For there is no denying the labour of Pope and his assistants. In a sense it is our first thorough edition. We cannot accuse Pope of scamping—we never can. It was the method that was unfortunate. We lament the misdirection of so much talent and energy.

He divided all the acts into scenes, and he would sometimes alter the division of the acts. He placed passages in the margin that he thought not to be by Shakespeare, but play-house interpolations. He omitted words here and there, or inserted words, generally for the sake of the rhythm; sometimes he omitted whole lines. He arranged prose as verse. He altered words that he thought were wrong. He was not a master of Elizabethan English, and he did not know that the double comparative and superlative were not errors; he therefore altered, for example, 'more fitter' to 'more fitting',¹ 'more corrupter' to 'far corrupter', and 'This was the most unkindest' to 'This, this was the unkindest'. We should have thought more highly of his work had his editing been less

¹ The double comparative had begun to disappear in the Second Folio.

thorough. But his aim is clear. He tries to do what Shakespeare had omitted to do. He prepares Shakespeare for the press. He gives us such an edition as he presumes Shakespeare himself would have given us had he brought it out with Jacob Tonson.

In the main we have to say of his Shakespeare that he produced it by the exercise of his taste. Malone had reason to rank him with the 'editor' of the Second Folio as the other great corrupter of the poet's text. Yet he has, though not a scholar, an important place in the history of Shakespearian scholarship, for he was the first editor to recognize the value of the Quartos and to make regular use of them. With him begins the long process of conflation. His text, based on Rowe's, derives from the Folio, but he often substituted a Quarto reading when the Folio gives good sense; and he inserted, and was thus the first to reprint, many passages which are preserved only in the Quartos. An interesting example of an editorial problem which confronted him—and for that matter confronts all of us—will be found in the first scene of the third act of *King Lear*, where at the same place we have two different passages—eight lines in the Folio and twelve in the Quarto. In both texts we have reason to suspect a cut, and we have therefore to consider if the Quarto pre-

serves what was omitted from the Folio, and similarly if the Folio preserves what was omitted from the Quarto. Pope, thinking chiefly of the sense, chose the Quarto passage as being a better preparation for what was to follow, and printed the difficult Folio passage—he called it unintelligible—in his margin. The next editor, with a proper zeal to honour every word, printed both passages in the text, the one after the other, and perhaps he thus approached to what was in Shakespeare's original manuscript, though the resultant twenty lines are far from satisfactory, and may preserve what Shakespeare had rejected. By the same process of incorporation, *Hamlet*, as we now read it, differs from any *Hamlet* that Shakespeare can have seen acted. This process began with Pope, but he did not grapple with the difficulties which it involves, and he may not have realized them. He would always have found a solvent in his taste.

At the end of his last volume he prints 'A Table of the Several Editions of *Shakespeare's* Plays, made use of and compared in this Impression'. The table begins with 'the First and Second Folios, the Third and the Fourth being purposely excluded. Then follow no fewer than twenty-nine Quartos. If any were supervised by Shakespeare, he says in the Preface, 'I should fancy the two parts of *Henry the 4th*, and *Midsummer-Night's Dream* might have

been so'; and he adds 'The whole number of genuine plays, which we have been able to find printed in his life-time amounts but to eleven'. So far he was on the right lines. He was on the right lines also when he tells us that in *Coriolanus* 'many of the principal speeches [are] copy'd from the life of Coriolanus in Plutarch', that is North's Plutarch. Of the speech on the Salic law in *Henry V* he says 'this whole speech is copied (in a manner *verbatim*) from Hall's Chronicle'. He ought to have said Holinshed's Chronicle. But Holinshed copied from Hall.

Still Pope is, in the main, the literary executor. The next editor has it to his credit that he approached his task rather as a scholar. The long quarrel between Pope and Theobald over Shakespeare was much more than a personal quarrel; it was largely a quarrel of methods, and there is no doubt with whom the victory now rests. On the one hand you have a man of genius pursuing a wrong method; on the other you have a man of very moderate capacity striving towards the right method. This in itself is sufficient to explain the varying estimate of their merits. With the advance of scholarship Theobald's reputation has increased, till it has passed—I venture to think—far beyond his deserts. The late Mr. Churton Collins called him in a striking essay the Porson of Shakespearian

Criticism, and asked us to believe that he was one of the greatest and finest textual critics that we have ever had or need hope to have. On the other hand, Samuel Johnson, who was no mean judge of character and capacity, once declared in conversation that Warburton would make 'two-and-fifty Theobalds, cut into slices', and gave it as his deliberate opinion in print that Theobald was 'a man of narrow comprehension and small acquisitions, with no native and intrinsic splendor of genius, with little of the artificial light of learning, but zealous for minute accuracy, and not negligent in pursuing it', adding, however, that 'in his reports of copies and editions he is not to be trusted without examination'.

Like all the others, Theobald based his text on that of the last edition. He based it on Pope's, even when he was the hero of *The Dunciad*. Consequently there is much of Pope in his text, much more than he can have suspected, and than a careful collator could have allowed. He preserved many needless emendations, even whole passages where Pope had taken great liberties. For example, Henry V makes this speech in the Folio, in prose:

Wee would haue all such offenders so cut off: and we giue expresse charge, that in our Marches through the Countrey, there be nothing compell'd from the Villages; nothing taken, but pay'd for: none of the French vp-

brayded or abused in disdainefull Language; for when Leuitie and Crueltie play for a Kingdome, the gentler Gamester is the soonest winner.

There are verse rhythms in this, and it is printed as verse in the Quartos, thus:

We would haue all offenders so cut off,
And we here giue expresse commaundment,
That there be nothing taken from the villages but
paid for,
None of the French abused,
Or abraided with disdainfull language:
For when cruelty and lenity play for a Kingdome,
The gentlest gamester is the sooner winner.

At the hands of Pope the passage became:

We would have such offenders so cut off,
And give express charge that in all our march
There shall be nothing taken from the villages
But shall be paid for, and no *French* upbraided
Or yet abused in disdainful language;
When lenity ¹ and cruelty play for kingdoms,
The gentler gamester is the soonest winner.

And so the whole passage is reproduced by Theobald, with insignificant changes in the punctuation. In his Table of the editions which he had collated, Pope's is placed under the heading 'Editions of no Authority'. It was Theobald's authority for far too much. He may speak of his 'diligent and laborious collation' of all the old copies, but no one who has tested his work minutely can deny

¹ Rowe had read 'Lenity'.

that his collation was haphazard. Another blemish is that he wrote bad notes, long, flabby, and dealing in wearisome iteration with the shortcomings of Pope. They alone would explain Johnson's estimate. We tire of the recurrent panegyric of his own critical acumen, as he, too, had tired of it when he came to prepare his second edition. But he is the first of our Shakespearian scholars, and for these reasons: He respected the readings of the old editions and did not give full rein to his taste. He made many emendations—one of them perhaps the most famous in all English literature¹—but he did not emend at sight. He endeavoured to explain and illustrate Shakespeare by the writings of his contemporaries. He recognized that the time had come for an English classic to be treated like the classics of Greece and Rome.

If the *Latin* and *Greek* Languages have receiv'd the greatest Advantages imaginable from the Labours of the Editors and Criticks of the two last Ages; by whose Aid and Assistance the Grammarians have been enabled to write infinitely better in that Art than even the preceding Grammarians, who wrote when those Tongues flourish'd as living Languages: I should account it a peculiar Happiness, that, by the faint Essay I have made in this Work, a Path might be chalk'd out, for abler Hands, by which to derive the same Advantages to our own Tongue.

¹ *Henry V*, II. iii. 17, 'a'bled of green Fields': *Shakespeare restored*, p. 138. See below, p. 58.

So he wrote in his Preface in 1733. In his first work on Shakespeare's text, the provocative *Shakespeare restored: or, a Specimen of the Many Errors, as well Committed, as Unamended, by Mr. Pope*, published in 1726, he had spoken of the novelty of his purpose no less clearly and confidently:

I ought to be in some Pain for the Figure that these Sheets may make, this being the *first Essay of literal Criticism* upon any Author in the ENGLISH Tongue. The Alteration of a *Letter*, when it restores Sense to a corrupted Passage, in a *learned Language*, is an Atchievement that brings Honour to the *Critick* who advances it: And Dr. BENTLEY will be remember'd to Posterity for his Performances of this Sort.¹

At a time when it could be said that 'there is not a great city in Europe so ill provided with Public Libraries as London', Theobald, like Pope, had to find his material as best he could, and in these circumstances it was a notable feat to have found in all forty-one Quartos, of which twenty-eight are earlier than the First Folio. Though a poor man, he was a keen collector and was the first Shakespearian scholar to form a good library of his own. It was dispersed by auction in 1744.²

¹ *Shakespeare restored*, p. 193. Pope, it will be noted, was not the first to associate the names of 'slashing Bentley' and 'pidling Tibalds'.

² A copy of the catalogue is in the Bodleian Library. The sale lasted four days, beginning 23 October 1744. There were 631 lots. Lot 460 is 'One hundred ninety-five old English Plays

The next two editions, Hanmer's and Warburton's, made no advance. Sir Thomas Hanmer, after an important political career, edited Shakespeare by the light of his own taste. He used Pope's edition, and corrected it, not by the Quartos and Folios, but by Theobald's. Great expectations were entertained at Oxford, where the book was magnificently printed. It is the first Oxford edition of Shakespeare, and it still ranks as one of the great productions of a great printing-house. So great were the expectations that a Gentleman of Oxford who had just been admitted to the Bachelor's degree, and whom we now know as the author of the 'Ode to Evening', was moved to write his *Verses Humbly Address'd to Sir Thomas Hanmer on his Edition of Shakespear's Works*. There we read that:

Those *Sibyl*-Leaves, the Sport of ev'ry Wind,
(For Poets ever were a careless Kind)
By thee dispos'd, no farther Toil demand,
But, just to Nature, own thy forming Hand.

The late Speaker of the House of Commons was understood to have settled the text of Shakespeare. Hanmer had good taste, but his toil was not exacting, and he did not in any way ease the

in Quarto, some of them so scarce as not to be had at any Price, to many of which are Manuscript Notes and Remarks of Mr. Theobald's, all done up neatly in Boards, in single Plays'.

labours of his successors. He is not even in the tradition, by which I mean that whereas every editor so far had formed his text on the text that was last printed, the next editor did not use Hanmer's. Warburton, whose edition is nominally 'by Mr. Pope and Mr. Warburton', based his text on Theobald's. There was nothing of the scholar's humility in Warburton. A well-authenticated reading had a poor chance against a fancy of his own. In his notes he showed, in Johnson's words, a rage for saying something when there is nothing to be said. It is not that his notes are pointless—they have often a very sharp point; but they do not help us to an understanding of Shakespeare, so much as to an understanding of Warburton himself. A man of his intellectual acquirements could not bring out an edition that was wholly bad. He did look at a Quarto occasionally; he made some good emendations, and wrote a few useful notes. But his work is disfigured by licence of conjecture, and he provided the example of what must not be done. No subsequent editor was to take so great liberties.

The battle had to be fought, and as we see it now there could be only one conclusion, but the ablest men were on the wrong side. To Pope, Hanmer, and Warburton, all men of great distinction in other occupations, editing was chiefly

a matter of taste. It was easy for them to make fun of the others:

Pains, reading, study are their just pretence,
And all they want is spirit, taste, and sense.

But when taste runs riot, the turn comes for the other side. Indeed, licence of conjecture had already found its satirist in Henry Fielding. It was the actors whom he made fun of in his *Journey from this World to the Next*, but the fun might have been inspired by graver editors:

I then observed *Shakespeare* standing between *Betterton* and *Booth*, and deciding a Difference between those two great Actors, concerning the placing an Accent in one of his Lines: this was disputed on both sides with a Warmth which surprized me in *Elysium*, till I discovered by Intuition, that every Soul retained its principal Characteristic, being, indeed, its very Essence. The Line was that celebrated one in *Othello*;

Put out the Light, and then put out the Light,
according to *Betterton*. Mr. *Booth* contended to have it thus;

Put out the Light, and then put out the Light.
I could not help offering my Conjecture on this Occasion, and suggested it might perhaps be,

Put out the Light, and then put out thy Light.
Another hinted a Reading very *sophisticated* in my Opinion,

Put out the Light, and then put out thee, Light;

making Light to be the vocative Case. Another would have altered the last Word, and read,

Put out thy Light, and then put out thy Sight.

But *Betterton* said, if the Text was to be *disturbed*, he saw no reason why a Word might not be changed as well as a Letter, and instead of *put out thy Light*, you might read *put out thy Eyes*. At last it was agreed on all sides, to refer the matter to the Decision of *Shakespeare* himself, who delivered his Sentiments as follows: 'Faith, Gentlemen, it is so long since I wrote the Line, I have forgot my Meaning. This I know, could I have dreamt so much Nonsense would have been talked, and writ about it, I would have blotted it out of my Works: for I am sure, if any of these be my Meaning, it doth me very little Honour.'

The late Mr. Aldis Wright used to say that 'ignorance and conceit are the fruitful parents of conjectural emendation'. The truth of the remark was never better illustrated than by Warburton,¹ and with him the period of unlicensed conjecture

¹ Warburton's methods were ridiculed by Thomas Edwards in *The Canons of Criticism*, first published in 1748, and often reprinted. But the interest of this book now lies largely in the 'Remarks on Shakespear' left by Richard Roderick (d. 1756), Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and added in the sixth edition in 1758. Roderick draws attention to the peculiarities of the verse of *Henry VIII*, remarking on the frequency of (1) the redundant syllable at the end of the line, (2) the caesura at the seventh foot, and (3) the clashing of the sense emphasis with the normal cadence of the line. He draws no conclusion from these peculiarities, and confesses himself unable to explain them. But here we are at the beginning of verse tests.

in our editions of Shakespeare may be said to have ended. Do not misunderstand me. No man can win his way to the first rank of textual critics merely by poring over old readings, just as no man can be a great man of science without imagination. But long experience is required before we can conjecture wisely; one little piece of evidence may demolish the most plausible emendation at a stroke. We have always to beware of conjectures, those which masquerade in the dress of scientific method quite as much as those which do not profess to be other than they are. The first lesson that we have to learn is that the reading of the old texts is 'probably true', and for some types of mind it is a hard lesson. 'Pains, reading, study' and 'spirit, taste, and sense' were once the mottoes of opposing parties, but the future was to rest with the party which inscribed them both on its banner.

It is the distinction of Samuel Johnson to have been the first leader of this party. 'Spirit, taste, and sense' he certainly had; 'pains, reading, and study' were his also to a greater degree than is commonly believed. We cannot easily point to any obvious difference between his method and Theobald's, but there is a clear difference in the application. In all respects his edition is incomparably superior. The text is better. Johnson had

bad eyesight—for the greater part of his life he had the sight of only one eye—but no one yet had shown like care in collation. He restored many of the readings of the First Folio, and introduced some from the Quartos. He was the first to be convinced that the First Folio was superior to the Second and was alone authoritative. 'I collated them all at the beginning', he says, 'but afterwards used only the first.' He also says 'as I practised conjecture more, I learned to trust it less'. His text is easily the best that had yet appeared. We have better texts now. But the value of his notes is permanent. 'Not a single passage in the whole work', he writes, 'has appeared to me corrupt, which I have not attempted to restore; or obscure, which I have not endeavoured to illustrate. In many I have failed like others; and from many, after all my efforts, I have retreated, and confessed the repulse.' There are several kinds of explanatory notes, but there are two main kinds, there are those which require historical knowledge, whether of events, or social conditions or habits, or books, or language; and there are those which require knowledge of human nature; and in the kind of notes which alone could be written if all the libraries in the world were burned, and we had nothing to guide us but our common sense and what we know of our fellow creatures and of the workings

of the head and of the heart, Johnson is supreme. In all those passages where scholarship and historical knowledge fail to give us their aid there is still no more helpful guide than he. Once we know him we may be trusted to ask, when baffled by a difficult passage, 'What does Johnson say?' It may be that we shall find 'I think this is wrong, but how to reform it I do not well see'; or 'what this means I do not know'; or 'I do not know what to do with this'. That is how Johnson 'retreated, and confessed the repulse'. He is equally honest when he thinks the fault to lie not in the text, but with the author: 'The truth is that the poet's matter failed him in the fifth act, and he was glad to fill it up with whatever he could get; and not even Shakespeare can write well without a proper subject. It is a vain endeavour for the most skilful hand to cultivate barrenness, or to paint upon vacuity.' When we read this, we breathe the open air.

The advance that was made after Johnson was in historical knowledge. Johnson himself had not made great researches, but he was a great favourer of historical investigation. His familiarity with the Elizabethans has too often been underestimated. I would remind you of a passage in the Preface to his *Dictionary*:

If the language of theology were extracted from *Hooker*

and the translation of the Bible; the terms of natural knowledge from *Bacon*; the phrases of policy, war, and navigation from *Raleigh*; the dialect of poetry and fiction from *Spenser* and *Sidney*; and the diction of common life from *Shakespeare*, few ideas would be lost to mankind, for want of *English* words, in which they might be expressed.

Johnson knew the greater Elizabethans well. He may have had little knowledge of Shakespeare's fellow dramatists beyond a passing acquaintance with Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher; and though it would be unsafe to assert of so omnivident a scholar that he was ignorant of the by-ways of Elizabethan literature, we cannot say that he was familiar with them. But he encouraged research, for he knew the importance of what it would yield. Some ten years before his own edition appeared he had contributed a Preface to Charlotte Lennox's collection of what we should now call Shakespeare's 'sources'. The title runs thus:—*Shakespear Illustrated: or the Novels and Histories, on which the Plays of Shakespear are founded, Collected and Translated from the Original Authors*. The examination of Shakespeare's sources had begun with Gerard Langbaine. In the 1691 edition of his remarkable catalogue, his *Account of the English Dramatick Poets*, we read, for example, that *All's well* is founded on a novel by Boccaccio, that the story of *Othello* is borrowed

from Giraldi Cinthio, and that the plot of *The Winter's Tale* 'may be read in a little Stitch-pamphlet, which is call'd, as I remember, *The Delectable History of Dorastus and Fawnia*'. Research on these lines was carried on fitfully for many years, and with obvious obligations to Langbaine. Pope was indebted to him, so was Theobald. Mrs. Lennox's book was a notable contribution. In its three handy volumes some of the stories from which Shakespeare's plays are ultimately derived are set forth at length or in extract—two by Giraldi Cinthio, two by Boccaccio, two by Bandello, as well as *Dorastus and Fawnia*, and long passages from Holinshed and Saxo-Grammaticus and other writers; and henceforth no serious student could neglect Shakespeare's own reading. The one contribution which Johnson made to this branch of Shakespearian scholarship was that *As You Like It* comes, not from *The Tale of Gamelyn*, but from 'a little pamphlet of those times'. He does not name it, and I suggest that he withheld the title because he did not wish to defraud another scholar of his discovery. I suspect that he heard of it during his visit to Cambridge shortly before he wrote his Preface. Not long after the Preface was published Lodge's *Rosalynde or Euphues Golden Legacye* was definitely named by Richard Farmer of Emmanuel

College and described as a Quarto published in 1590.¹

Of the importance of Farmer's treatise on the reading which went to the making of Shakespeare's dramas there can be no question. We may not all of us agree with his conclusions, but the amount of learning which he himself displayed in his *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* was astonishing in 1767, and is still astonishing. He lived unostentatiously in his college, dispensing hospitality, collecting his library, and with no solicitude about his fame. He is the author of only one little book; but it is packed with matter of the first value, and its publication may be taken to mark roughly the next stage in Shakespearian scholarship.

There were other scholars at work at the same time. The whole movement in English studies was turning decisively towards research. Indeed, we may well wonder if research was ever undertaken with greater enthusiasm, and carried on with more notable achievements, than in the second half of the eighteenth century. These scholars had the advantage of being early in the field, but they proved themselves worthy of their opportunity. There was Thomas Warton; greater still, there was Thomas Tyrwhitt. By this time,

¹ But Farmer's sale catalogue, *Bibliotheca Farmeriana*, 1798, has the edition of 1612, not the edition of 1590 (lot 5920).

too, the British Museum, founded by Act of Parliament in 1753, had surmounted its initial difficulties and become the haunt of the learned, a selecter body in those days than now.

The two great Shakespearian scholars of the end of the century are George Steevens and Edmond Malone. But we must not neglect an editor who ought to be better known than he is, Edward Capell. His edition came out immediately after Johnson's. He collated all the old texts with a thoroughness that has rarely been equalled; unfortunately he showed somewhat erratic judgment in the choice of readings, and by an arrangement which has prejudiced his reputation, and was dictated by his care for the look of his small octavo page, his great collection of notes was published separately, and at a later date, in two large quarto volumes which are not easily procured and are little known. Even rarer is the third volume entitled *The School of Shakespeare*, consisting of extracts from English books whence Shakespeare's 'several Fables were taken, and some Parcel of his Dialogue: Also, further Extracts, from the same or like Books, which ~~or~~ contribute to a due Understanding of his Writings, or give Light to the History of his Life, or to the dramatic History of his Time'. The book is of the same kind as Mrs. Lennox's *Shakespear Illustrated*, but far beyond

it in learning; and it gives us a very high opinion of the range of Capell's reading. He was unfortunate in another respect. He had great difficulty with current English and wrote a forbidding style. 'If the man would have come to me', said Johnson on reading his Preface and recalling what Prospero says to Caliban, 'I would have endeavoured to endow his purposes with words; for as it is, he doth gabble monstrously.' His memory is justly honoured in Trinity College, Cambridge, where he deposited during his lifetime his great collection of Shakespeare Folios and Quartos.

Nor ought we to forget another man who has seldom received his due, Charles Jennens, 'under whose patronage, by access to whose library, and from whose hints and remarks' an edition of *King Lear* was published in 1770, to be followed by editions of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar*. In these editions the notes are merely textual, and they are our first instance of a strict critical apparatus. 'No editor', says the Preface to *King Lear*, 'has a right to impose upon every body his own favourite reading, or to give his own conjectural interpolation, without producing the readings of the several editions' (he was thinking in particular of Capell): 'the editor who does so, though he may be a good critic, will not be looked

'upon as a fair dealer.' So far as they go, these editions compare very favourably with any of their date. They contain many readings which later men have claimed, or been supposed, to be the first to record or restore; but the absence of explanatory notes, and the somewhat haphazard way in which these five plays appeared separately, would seem to have told against their due recognition. Jennens owned twenty-eight Quartos.¹

Johnson's edition, published right in the middle of that very important decade in English scholarship as in English poetry, the decade from 1760 to 1770, is the culmination of the older school of editing, which, though it knew the value of historical investigation, had not engaged in it systematically. The best and the permanent results had been achieved by insight and common sense. The next school was to reinforce common sense with research. When a new edition of his Shakespeare was called for, Johnson entrusted the care of it to George Steevens,² and the process which ultimately gave us the great variorum editions had begun. In point of learning Steevens had every qualification for the task. As a young man of thirty, he

¹ They were sold at the Howe sale in December 1907.

² Steevens had independently issued the Prospectus of a new edition on 1 February 1766, and in it had said that 'A perfect edition of the Plays of Shakespeare requires at once the assistance of the Antiquary, the Historian, the Grammarian, and the Poet.'

had brought out a reprint of twenty of the Quartos, a book which would have been notable at any time, and is especially notable as having appeared in the year 1766. But there was a kink in his character which as he came to be better known grew more pronounced. Gifford called him 'the Puck of Commentators'. He took a malicious delight in playing tricks on others. He would write notes on such passages or expressions as are now omitted in school editions and sign them with the names of clergymen with whom he had quarrelled. Or he would invent information to entrap an unwary rival—sometimes a friend whom he regarded as a rival. He tried to entrap Malone. We cannot trust Steevens. It is equally true that we can never neglect him. We may not share his opinions, but we cannot question his learning.

Of Malone I will say little. If Johnson is the culmination of the earlier school of eighteenth-century editors, Malone is the culmination of the later. He is more: he remains the greatest of all our Shakespearian scholars. With a learning which was at least as great as Steevens's he unites a passion for the truth. We can always trust *him*. He never covers up his traces. When he is wrong he enables us to prove him wrong. In 1778 he contributed to Steevens's second edition his 'Attempt to ascertain the Order in which the

'Plays attributed to Shakespeare were Written', our first investigation of this subject, and in 1780 he added two supplementary volumes containing the Poems (Steevens refused to print the Sonnets), the apocryphal plays, and a mass of observations. His own edition, on which he had been engaged 'with unceasing solicitude' for eight years, appeared in 1790. There he printed his 'Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the English Stage', our first authoritative treatise on the early drama. He was still at work on Shakespeare when he died in 1812. His papers passed to James Boswell, the son of the biographer, and 'Boswell's Malone', as it is commonly called, at length appeared in twenty-one volumes in 1821. It is the last of the old variorum editions, and it is still the standard complete edition. To later editors and scholars it has been a rich quarry. The indebtedness of our modern editions to 'Boswell's Malone', or to the eighteenth-century editions which are summed up in it, is greater than can be acknowledged.

Steevens and Malone both formed great libraries. Steevens's was sold by auction on his death in 1800; it contained about fifty Quartos, of which over thirty were earlier than the First Folio. The best of Malone's books, in all over three thousand volumes and tracts, passed to the Bodleian Library

in 1815.¹ Of the Shakespearian collections owned by Theobald, Capell, Farmer, Jennens, Steevens, Isaac Reed, and Malone, only two, Capell's and Malone's, are preserved in this country intact.

These men of the eighteenth century anticipated us in more than we think. I quote from Malone's 'Preface of 1790:

My late friend Mr. Tyrwhitt, a man of such candour, accuracy, and profound learning, that his death must be considered as an irreparable loss to literature, was of opinion, that in printing these plays the original spelling should be adhered to, and that we never could be sure of a perfectly faithful edition, unless the first folio copy was made the standard, and actually sent to the press, with such corrections as the editor might think proper.

What have we been saying for many years now? Mr. Aldis Wright declared in conversation that if he had to begin the Cambridge Shakespeare again, and without the trammel of a colleague, he would give the old spelling.

Another point: these men knew that some knowledge of Elizabethan handwriting is an aid to the emendation of Shakespeare's text. When Theobald found the conjecture¹ that 'a Table of greene fields' should read 'a' talked of green Fields'

¹ The Bodleian Library did not receive all Malone's Elizabethan collection, nor all his dramatic pieces. The 'greater portion' of his library, 'including a few duplicates of his early English poetry', was dispersed in an eight-days' sale beginning 26 November 1818.

and himself proposed to alter 'talked' to 'babled', he said that by this alteration 'we may still come nearer to the Traces of the Letters'.¹ When Upton said that 'We heare two Lyons litter'd in one day' (*Julius Caesar*, II. ii. 46) ought to be 'Wee are', &c., he explained that 'there was some stroke of the pen at the end of the letter e, which made the printer mistake it for an b'.² Jennens likewise is found speaking of 'the traces of the letters'. These men did not pursue this method resolutely, but the method was known before our day.

Yet a third point: these men knew the problem of punctuation. 'I have considered the punctuation as wholly in my power,' said Johnson. It was an inevitable conclusion with a modernized text. The present spelling has been introduced gradually, and the printers are mainly responsible for it, just as they are responsible for the differences between the Authorized Version of to-day and of 1611. Even in the seventeenth century each successive Folio corresponds more or less to current practice; so also in the eighteenth century, when Pope's text was printed from Rowe's, and Theobald's from Pope's, and Warburton's from Theobald's, and Johnson's from Warburton's, and so on. But the punctuation could not be left wholly to the printer

¹ *Shakespeare restored*, 1726, p. 138.

² *Critical Observations on Shakespeare*, ed. 2, 1748, p. 176.

when it affected the sense of disputed passages, and certainly not when the authority of the First Folio was established and its evidence had to be taken. The eighteenth-century editors thought that its punctuation was erratic. 'What', asked Johnson, 'could be their care of colons and commas, who corrupted words and sentences?' Even Malone seems not to have suspected that the old punctuation was, as Mr. Aldis Wright put it, 'rhetorical rather than logical'. But in 1797 we find George Chalmers in his *Apology for the Believers in the Shakespeare Papers* devoting a long section of this varied book to punctuation, and there we read that

The *punctuation* of Shakspeare's text is certainly in the power of every commentator, as Johnson observed, though the practice must be regulated, by the context, and the principle governed, by system.

Chalmers then proceeded to deal with the history of English punctuation, quoting Hart's *Orthographie*, 1569, and referring to Bullokar's *Amendment*, 1580, and Stockwood's *English Accidence*, 1590, and arriving at the conclusion that Shakespeare 'pointed his dramas on the principles of Hart, without semicolons'. It may be true, or it may not. But these eighteenth-century men had been there before us.

III

I HAVE now to conclude this course of three lectures by speaking of Shakespeare's critics in the eighteenth century.

Let me remind you of what Dryden had said about Shakespeare in his essay *Of Dramatic Poesy*:

All the Images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learn'd; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature; he look'd inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is every where alike . . . He is many times flat, insipid; his Comick wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into Bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him.

In the tempering of its enthusiastic praise with judicious censure this passage strikes the key-note of all the best criticism that was to be written for the next hundred years. It is a general estimate; and there is nothing in it that was not to be repeated or developed. When Samuel Johnson wrote his *Life of Dryden*, he singled it out from the whole body of Dryden's work for his highest praise:

The account of Shakespeare may stand as a perpetual model of encomiastick criticism; exact without minute-

ness, and lofty without exaggeration. The praise lavished by Longinus, on the attestation of the heroes of Marathon by Demosthenes, fades away before it. In a few lines is exhibited a character, so extensive in its comprehension, and so curious in its limitations, that nothing can be added, diminished, or reformed; nor can the editors and admirers of Shakespeare, in all their emulation of reverence, boast of much more than of having diffused and paraphrased this epitome of excellence, of having changed Dryden's gold for baser metal, of lower value though of greater bulk.

This, another model of encomiastic criticism, was written in the year 1779, and if there is anything in it that might then have been questioned, it is the sentence that 'nothing can be added, diminished, or reformed'. Something was already being added. There would have been little occasion to question it, however, when Johnson wrote his great Preface to Shakespeare. We have seen that Johnson's edition, published in 1765, may be taken to mark the culmination of the older school of editing. We have now to say that the Preface to this edition is the climax of what we may call the older type of Shakespearian criticism.

This type looks back to Dryden; the best critics until the time of Johnson are those who are likest Dryden. Let me remind you again that if we read the whole body of Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare, in which much may seem at first to be

‘contradictory, we find that he always returns to Shakespeare’s truth to nature in the depiction of character and the representation of the passions. He is not much concerned with the structure of the plays, and the bulk of his censure is reserved for incidental faults in taste for which he held the Elizabethan age chiefly responsible. Whatever his topics, and though he deals with them differently at different times—sometimes deliberately, sometimes hastily,—the burden of all his criticism is Shakespeare’s, the Divine Shakespeare’s, truth to Nature.

When we turn to Pope’s estimate of Shakespeare in the Preface to his edition, we find little with which we are not already familiar. Pope has read Dryden; he has also read Rymer, and Farquhar’s *Discourse upon Comedy*, and Gildon’s *Essay on the Stage*, and Dennis’s *Letters on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare*. He has made himself familiar with what is sometimes called the literature of the subject. I doubt if he contributes any new idea beyond shifting the blame for Shakespeare’s faults from the Elizabethan age to the Elizabethan theatre, and the acting profession. He makes the point that Shakespeare’s art suffered by his ‘being a Player, and forming himself first, upon the judgments of that body of men whereof he was a member’. By being a player Shakespeare

had learned what would immediately please his audience, but he was at times content to please too easily; and on this showing most of his faults 'are less to be ascribed to his wrong judgment as a Poet, then to his right judgment as a Player'.¹ Apart from this, he gives us an admirable summing up of all that he had read and tested, and if we should want to know what was thought about Shakespeare in the year 1725—what I may call the average well-informed opinion—we shall find it expressed with great distinction of style in Pope's Preface.

He begins, like Dryden, with Shakespeare's truth to Nature:

✓ If ever any Author deserved the name of an *Original*, it was *Shakespear*. *Homer* himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of Nature. . . . The Poetry of *Shakespear* was Inspiration indeed: he is not so much an Imitator, as an Instrument, of Nature; and 'tis not so

¹ The brief paragraph from which these quotations are taken is an interesting anticipation of the paper by Mr. Robert Bridges on *The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama*. 'The first things', says Mr. Bridges, 'which such an appeal to our instinctive feelings will unhesitatingly cast out, will be the bad jokes and obscenities; and the magnitude of these is of logical importance. As for the mere foolish verbal trifling, even if full allowance be made for Tudor fashions of speech, it shows Shakespeare's desire to please a part of his audience with whom we have little sympathy, and proves that he did not aim at maintaining all parts of his work at a high level. As for the second item, the same judgment is inevitable.'

“just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks thro’ him.

He passes to the Characters, and says that whereas those of other poets have a constant resemblance, ‘every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual as those in life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike’. He speaks next of Shakespeare’s power over the Passions, a power which was never possessed in a more eminent degree, or displayed in so different instances; there is no labour, no preparation, ‘but the heart swells, and the tears burst out, just at the proper places’; and laughter was equally at the command of a poet who was ‘not more a master of the Great than of the Ridiculous’. Then he turns to the Sentiments, which show corresponding power in the coolness of reflection and reasoning, and are amazing in their aptness; ‘he seems to have known the world by intuition, to have looked through human nature at one glance.’

All these are put in one scale of the balance. In the other are great defects. They are to be accounted for mainly ‘as we have seen: ‘to be obliged to please the lowest of people, and to keep the worst of company . . . will appear sufficient to mislead and depress the greatest genius upon earth’. If we are disposed to attribute them to want of learning, we have to define what we mean

by learning; it is plain that Shakespeare had much reading.

By an easy transition he passes on to speak of the condition of the text as he found it, the negligences of the actors who were responsible for the printing, and 'the dull duty of an editor', and then he concludes with a brief estimate; which, by the way, ought to serve as a corrective to some current opinions on Pope's views of the Gothic:

with all his faults, and with all the irregularity of his *Drama*, one may look upon his works, in comparison of those that are more finish'd and regular, as upon an ancient majestick piece of *Gothick Architecture*, compar'd with a neat Modern building: The latter is more elegant and glaring, but the former is more strong and more solemn.

I have given this brief abstract of Pope's Preface in the belief that it is the best and the representative piece of Shakespearian criticism written during the first half of the eighteenth century. It is representative in its method quite as much as its matter, for it describes Shakespeare's characteristic excellences and faults in general, and is not concerned with any one play in particular. As for the matter, that will explain what Johnson meant when he said that the critics after Dryden had paraphrased and expanded Dryden's 'epitome of excellence'.

' We ought not, however, to think only of Pope's Preface. The better half of criticism, he said, is to point out excellences, and this he did throughout his edition by distinguishing the most shining passages with inverted commas, and sometimes by affixing a star to a whole scene. In this way he indicated the particulars on which the generalities of his Preface were based. He also provided an elaborate Index, divided into sections on such subjects as Characters, Manners and Passions, Thoughts or Sentiments, Speeches, Descriptions, and Similes and Allusions. It is a companion piece to the Index to his Homer, and neither of them is a negligible document in the study of Pope as a critic. Selection of the shining passages in Shakespeare had begun before Pope. Many are to be found in the anthology included in Bysshe's *Art of English Poetry* published in 1702, and in similar works.¹ But Pope was the first to point them out systematically. Warburton followed him in 1747, and then in 1752 the notorious Dr. Dodd published *The Beauties of Shakespear*, a book that has outlived all the many similar selections from other poets and prose-writers to which it set the fashion.²

¹ e.g. *Thesaurus Dramaticus. Containing all the Celebrated Passages, Soliloquies, Similies, Descriptions, and other Poetical Beauties in the Body of English Plays*, 2 vols., 1724.

² e.g. *The Beauties of Poetry Display'd*, 1757; *The Beauties of all the Magazines*, 1762; *The Beauties of the Spectators &c.*,

Dodd made his own selection, but his book derives from Pope's edition.

Forty years after Pope, Johnson brought out his own Preface. By common consent nowadays it is one of the greatest essays on Shakespeare that has ever been written, but it has not won this pre-eminence by any novelty in its method or its object. It gives us the general estimate, and it gives us the final statement of the old common-places of Shakespearian criticism:

Shakespeare [we read] is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters . . . are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find. His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of *Shakespeare* it is commonly a species.

[His plays are filled] with practical axioms and domestick wisdom . . . Yet his real power is not shown in the splendour of particular passages.

Perhaps no poet ever kept his personages more distinct from each other.

Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion. 1763; *The Beauties of English Poesy*, selected by Oliver Goldsmith, 1767; *The Beauties of Johnson*, 1782, &c., &c.

“ This therefore is the praise of *Shakespeare*, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious extasies, by reading human sentiments in human language; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.

This is what we may call ‘old style’, the old style in perfection. There is nothing here but derives from Pope and Dryden.

Johnson then proceeds, in the familiar manner, to speak of Shakespeare’s defects, and speaks of them with an emphasis which was repellent to some later critics, and was largely responsible for the eclipse of his reputation in the earlier half of the nineteenth century, when fault-finding with Shakespeare was not allowed. He was aware of his severity. ‘We must confess the faults of our favourite’, he explained in a private letter, ‘to gain credit to our praise of his excellencies.’ Here again we find that much of what he says is implicit in the older estimates. ‘In tragedy’, we read, ‘his performance seems constantly to be worse, as his labour is more . . . whenever he solicits his invention, or strains his faculties, the offspring of his throes is tumour, meanness, tediousness, and obscurity.’ What is this but an over-emphasized repetition of what Dryden had said about Shake-

speare's bombast? When he tells us that Shakespeare is 'seldom very successful when he engages his characters, in reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm' and then enlarges on Shakespeare's inability to resist the fatal fascination of a quibble—in a passage which he wrote with manifest pleasure, and I suspect largely for its own sake and as a later poet would have said, without keeping his eye steadily fixed on the object—again he is paraphrasing and expanding Dryden. 'He is many times flat, insipid, his comic wit degenerating into clenches,' says Dryden; Johnson says 'A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it'. The whole passage on Shakespeare's defects is, we shall probably all agree, needlessly severe. It is as if Johnson in his scrupulous honesty, and in his fear of betraying any prejudice, had written down on the debit side of the balance-sheet everything he could think of, and had deliberately overstated the amount. He shows no mercy. Why should he? The surplus is overwhelming. 'The stream of time which is continually washing the dissoluble fabricks of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakespeare.' If Shakespeare has anywhere a rival, it is Homer, and Homer alone. Shakespeare's faults are 'sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit', but why need we

⁶try to exonerate *him*? Johnson had little sympathy with the attempt to lay the blame for these faults on the age, or the actors. There ~~was~~ much in him that could not be so excused.

But the structure of the plays was not one of Shakespeare's faults. Since the time of Dryden and Rymer the critics had not ceased to debate whether or not the action of a play ought to be confined to one place and completed within twenty-four hours, and whether underplots were permissible. Johnson himself had conformed in his *Irene* to the strict methods of what was called the regular drama, and then, shortly after *Irene* was acted, he had challenged in *The Rambler* the arguments by which these methods were defended. 'It is rarely observed', he there said, 'that minds not prepossessed by mechanical criticism feel any offence from the extension of the intervals between the acts; nor can I conceive it absurd or impossible, that he who can multiply three hours into twelve or twenty-four, might image with equal ease a greater number.'¹ When he wrote his Preface, the time had come for a definite pronouncement. A young poet had made fun of the critics' rules in a spirited epistle to Garrick:

When Shakespeare leads the mind a dance,
From France to England, hence to France,

¹ No. 156 (Sept. 14, 1751), as revised in 1752.

Talk not to me of time and place;
 I own I'm happy in the chace.
 Whether the drama's here or there,
 'Tis nature,¹ Shakespeare, every where.
 The poet's fancy can create,
 Contract, enlarge, annihilate,
 Bring past and present close together,
 In spite of distance, seas, or weather;
 And shut up in a single action
 What cost whole years in its transaction.

Yet those who breathe the classic vein,
 Enlisted in the mimic train,
 Who ride their steed with double bit,
 Ne'er run away with by their wit,
 Delighted with the pomp of rules,
 The specious pedantry of schools,
 (Which rules, like crutches, ne'er became
 Of any use but to the lame)
 Pursue the method set before 'em;
 Talk much of order, and decorum,
 Of probability of fiction,
 Of manners, ornament, and diction,
 And with a jargon of hard names,
 (A privilege which dulness claims,
 And merely us'd by way of fence,
 To keep out plain and common sense)
 Extol the wit of antient days,
 The simple fabric of their plays.¹ . . .

The writer of these clever lines—Robert Lloyd—
 was about the same time given a prominent place

¹ *Shakespeare: An Epistle to Mr. Garrick, 1760.*

in Churchill's satire *The Rosciad*—the most famous satire of the century after *The Dunciad*—and his views on Shakespeare and the drama of Greece and Rome are there set out at some length. More important than these was the book which a Scots judge, Henry Home Lord Kames, had brought out in 1762, called *Elements of Criticism*. Boswell tells us that Johnson spoke of it on their first meeting in Mr. Davies's back parlour. It is, he is reported to have said, 'a pretty essay and deserves to be held in some estimation'. On a later occasion Goldsmith is reported to have said 'it is easier to write that book than to read it'. Evidence that Johnson had read it is to be found in his Preface.

Kames devotes a chapter ¹ to 'the three unities', and argues that whereas the unities of one place and one day were in Greece a matter of necessity, not of choice, if we submit to them it must be from choice, not necessity. The crucial part of his argument is this:

The spectator may be conscious that the real time and place are not the same with what are employed in the representation: but this is a work of reflection; and by the same reflection he may also be conscious that Garrick is not King Lear, that the playhouse is not Dover Cliffs, nor the noise he hears thunder and lightning. In a word, after an interruption of the representation, it is no more

¹ Chapter 23.

difficult for a spectator to imagine a new place, or a different time, than at the commencement of the play, to imagine himself at Rome, or in a period of time two thousand years back. And indeed it is abundantly ridiculous, that a critic, who is willing to hold candle-light for sunshine, and some painted canvasses for a palace or a prison, should be so scrupulous about admitting any latitude of place or of time in the fable, beyond what is necessary in the representation.

This is well put, and it won due notice. That it is not better known now is only because it has been eclipsed by the greater passage in Johnson's Preface:

Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation; if the spectator can be once persuaded, that his old acquaintance are *Alexander* and *Cæsar*, that a room illuminated with candles is the plain of *Pharsalia*, or the bank of *Granicus*, he is in a state of elevation above the reach of reason, or of truth, and from the heights of empyrean poetry, may despise the circumscriptions of terrestrial nature. . . . The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players. They come to hear a certain number of lines recited with just gesture and elegant modulation. The lines relate to some action, and an action must be in some place; but the different actions that compleat a story may be in places very remote from each other; and where is the absurdity of allowing that space to represent first *Athens*, and then *Sicily*, which was always known to be neither *Sicily* nor *Athens*, but a modern theatre?

° Here the reflections from Kames's 'elegant essay' are unmistakable; and they are not the only reflections in this section of the Preface. We could say with equal certainty that Johnson had read the case for the other side as stated by Brumoy in his *Théâtre des Grecs* even if we did not know that he had contributed to Mrs. Lennox's translation of that work.¹ The question of his originality does not arise. After all it was Johnson who, as far as English criticism is concerned, settled the problem of the dramatic unities once and for all. The point we should rather make now is that when he wrote his Preface he had made himself familiar with everything of note bearing on any of its topics.

This might be further illustrated by the use that he made of Voltaire's recent essay on the English Theatre. But I choose another memorable passage which it is always a pleasure to quote:

Upon every other stage the universal agent is love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed, and every action quickened or retarded. To bring a lover, a lady, and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contra-

¹ *The Greek Theatre of Father Brumoy. Translated by Mrs. Charlotte Lennox*, 3 vols., 1759. Johnson contributed the translation of the 'Dissertation upon the Greek Comedy' and 'The General Conclusion' in the third volume. The part which he had in mind, and answered, in his discussion of the unities is in the 'Discourse upon the Original of Tragedy', vol. i, pp. xliii-xlvi.

can seldom be sure that he had read a book 'through', we need not doubt that he had read this passage. But all the matter of controversy on the place of Love in tragedy was before him when he wrote his Preface. So it was with other controversies. The whole Preface is a summing up of critical opinion on Shakespeare, and a verdict.

The Preface deals with Shakespeare as a man and as a writer, and not with any single play. The purpose is to state in general, though with incidental detail, what the name of Shakespeare ought to suggest to every intelligent mind. The attitude is judicial, 'without envious malignity or superstitious veneration'. Impartial examination would prove Shakespeare to be the greatest writer, or one of the two greatest writers, in the world's literature; still he was a man who lived as other men do, and if he made mistakes he was chargeable with them as other men are.

Such is the older criticism, and its final exponent is Johnson. On its own lines it is difficult to see that any advance was possible.

The advance was made on other lines, and Johnson himself was one of its leaders. Just as his edition of Shakespeare is the pivot of the old and the new scholarship of the eighteenth century, similarly we may take it as a rough mark for the beginning of the new criticism. We need not look

for this new criticism in the Preface. But it speaks out loud and bold in the Notes.

In these Notes Johnson did not confine himself to textual difficulties. Like Warburton before him, and Theobald, and Pope, he would draw attention to the beauty of a line or passage; and he would sometimes add his estimate of the play as a whole. He is at his happiest when he is moved to write about a character. Of Polonius he says:

Such a man is positive and confident, because he knows that his mind was once strong, and knows not that it is become weak. Such a man excels in general principles, but fails in the particular application. He is knowing in retrospect, and ignorant in foresight. While he depends upon his memory, and can draw from his repositories of knowledge, he utters weighty sentences, and gives useful counsel; but as the mind in its enfeebled state cannot be kept long busy and intent, the old man is subject to sudden dereliction of his faculties, he loses the order of his ideas, and entangles himself in his own thoughts, till he recovers the leading principle, and falls again into his former train. This idea of dotage encroaching upon wisdom, will solve all the phænomena of the character of *Polonius*.

We need not expect a truer account of Polonius than this, which was borrowed by Coleridge, and not bettered in the borrowing. I am tempted to quote also part of the account of Falstaff. It shows

that this very judicial critic was judicial even in his exultation:

But *Falstaff* unimitated, unimitable *Falstaff*, how shall I describe thee? Thou compound of sense and vice: of sense which may be admired but not esteemed, of vice which may be despised, but hardly detested. *Falstaff* is a character loaded with faults, and with those faults which naturally produce contempt. He is a thief, and a glutton, a coward, and a boaster, always ready to cheat the weak, and prey upon the poor; to terrify the timorous and insult the defenceless. At once obsequious and malignant, he satirises in their absence those whom he lives by flattering. He is familiar with the prince only as an agent of vice, but of this familiarity he is so proud as not only to be supercilious and haughty with common men, but to think his interest of importance to the duke of *Lancaster*. Yet the man thus corrupt, thus despicable, makes himself necessary to the prince that despises him, by the most pleasing of all qualities, perpetual gaiety, by an unfailing power of exciting laughter, which is the more freely indulged, as his wit is not of the splendid or ambitious kind, but consists in easy escapes and sallies of levity, which make sport but raise no envy.

These passages are embedded in Johnson's Notes. They herald the new subject—the study of Shakespeare's characters, and the study of Shakespeare through his characters; and this subject has remained the chief occupation of the best Shakespearean criticism to the time of Mr. A. C. Bradley.

° In matters of this kind we need not hope to find a definite beginning, nor need we look for the man with an undisputed claim, to be called 'the first'. There had been indications of the new criticism in the periodical essays.¹ A notable essay on Polonius, for instance, is in *The Prompter* for 27 May 1735. The writer is attacking bad acting and proposes 'to consider some characters in our dramattick pieces as they were originally *designed* by the poets, who *drew* them, and as they *appear* to an audience, from the manner in which the actor *personates* them'. He chooses Polonius as his first illustration and writes of him thus:

Polonius, according to *Shakespear*, is a *Man of a most excellent Understanding, and great Knowledge of the World*, whose Ridicule arises not from any *radical Folly* in the old Gentleman's Composition, but a certain *Affectation of Formality and Method*, mix'd with a smattering of the Wit of that Age (which consisted in playing upon Words) which being grown up with him, is *incorporated* (if I may venture the Expression) with all his *Words* and *Actions* . . .

How does *Polonius* appear to an Audience at present? He never *looks*, or *speaks*, but the Fool *stares* out of his *Eyes*, and is *marked* in the *Tone* of his *Voice*.²

The compass of a half-sheet is devoted in this

¹ Early instances of periodical essays on Shakespeare are the paper by John Hughes on *Othello* in *The Guardian*, No. 37 (1713) and the two papers by Theobald on *King Lear* in *The Censor*, Nos. 7 and 10 (1715). They are descriptive, with observations on beauties and morals.

² Cf. *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet*, 1736, p. 23.

manner to 'the recovery of Polonius's true character'. A little later in the same periodical we have an account of the true character of Hamlet, written with the purpose of showing that neither of the leading tragedians of the year 1735 was constitutionally capable of representing it.¹ These papers give colour to the view that the examination of Shakespeare's characters had its home, as indeed we might expect, in the theatre rather than in the study. If the matter were worth arguing, evidence could easily be produced on both sides, but it would have to be admitted that as the century advances the theatrical criticism² loses its value as an aid to the interpretation of Shakespeare's characters in comparison with the criticism written by those who, for all they say, might never have seen a play acted, or even have remembered that a play is written to be acted.

Joseph Warton had contributed to *The Adventurer* in 1753 two papers on *The Tempest*, and three on *King Lear*,³ which describe the plays as a whole, but contain detailed passages on some of the characters, that on Caliban being the most

¹ *The Prompter*, No. C, 24 October 1735: in Hamlet 'the Double Capacity of Mr. WILKS, and Mr. BOOTH, shou'd unite, in ONE Actor.'

² The outstanding books are *The Dramatic Censor*, by Francis Gentleman, 2 vols, 1770, and *Dramatick Miscellanies*, by Thomas Davies, 3 vols., 1783-4.

³ Nos. 93, 97, 113, 116, and 122 (5 January 1754)

'notable. They were immediately followed in *The Gray's Inn Journal* by three other papers on *King Lear*,¹ suggested in part by Warton's, and devoted largely to a discussion of whether Lear's madness was induced by the loss of his kingdom or the ingratitude of his daughters. In such papers as these we see that the change from 'general criticism' to the examination of characters and motives was at hand. What we ought in particular to notice is that the new subject arose easily and directly out of the old. Shakespeare's 'truth to Nature' had been proclaimed by every one since Dryden. The time had now come for it to be exemplified. In his first critical work Pope had said that Nature and Homer were the same. When he came to write on Shakespeare, he almost said that Nature and Shakespeare were the same. He might have said it had he been writing in verse; but in guarded, paraphrastic prose he says that Shakespeare is an instrument of nature, and that his characters are so much nature herself that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her. The later critics were boldly to assume that they were the same. These dramatic creations come to be treated as historic beings. Simultaneously criticism ceases to be pre-eminently judicial; it rather interprets.

¹ Nos. 65 (12 January 1754), 66, and 87.

This criticism, foreseen by Warton and others,¹ and announced by Johnson,² makes its definite entrance a few years later in the essays of three writers who worked independently of each other, and were all assured of the originality of their purpose. Some time before 1770 Thomas Whately designed a study of eight or ten of the principal characters of Shakespeare, but he was a busy government official—he was under-secretary of state to Lord North—and he lived to write on only two of them. The fragment which deals with Richard III and Macbeth was first published in 1785, thirteen years after his death, under the title of *Remarks on some of the Characters of Shakespeare*. William Richardson, a young Professor of Latin in the University of Glasgow, was the first to get

¹ Shortly after the publication of Johnson's edition we find the following articles on Shakespeare in *The British Magazine*: 'Some Observations on the Caliban of Shakespeare' (January 1766); 'Shakespeare Vindicated from the Imputation of wanting Art,' by Thomas Warton (February 1767); 'Observations upon the Tragedy of Macbeth' (October 1767); 'Shakespeare's Merits as a Comic Writer' and 'Remarks upon the Tragedy of Julius Cæsar' (November 1767); 'Observations upon the Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet' and 'Observations upon the Tragedy of Richard III' (December 1767). Before 1765 the only articles on Shakespeare in this magazine are 'An Essay on the Merits of Shakespeare and Corneille' (June 1760) and 'An Essay upon Shakespeare's Learning', by G. D. (August 1761). Should it be thought fanciful to find in these two lists evidence of the influence of Johnson's edition, it will at least be admitted that the year in which the edition was published has historical significance as a turning-point.

'into print; his *Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters*, with chapters on the characters of Macbeth, Hamlet, Jaques, and Imogen, appeared in 1774, immediately after it was written. About the same time Maurice Morgann, another government official, wrote his *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*, but did not publish it till 1777, when he had revised and enlarged it. Of these three writers Morgann is easily the greatest, but Whately's fragment deserves more attention than it now receives. His comparison of Richard III and Macbeth contains many acute observations, in a manner that reminds us of later and more familiar critics. It is enough now to refer to his Introduction, where he speaks of

a subject for criticism, more worthy of attention than the common topics of discussion: I mean the distinction and preservation of *Character*;

and where he goes on to say that if we desire to train our observation of the development and play of character even in real life, we should do well to study Shakespeare's men and women, who are drawn 'correct to a scrupulous precision'. Richardson is frankly the moral philosopher; he finds in Shakespeare the material for 'tracing the principles of human conduct'. The difficulty which the philosopher has to contend with is that the passions

are liable to change suddenly in force and direction' under the influence of causes that may be indefinable or hidden, but in the drama as Shakespeare wrote it their progress is set down in a record which we may examine as minutely as we like at our leisure. By contrast Morgann is a gay enthusiast. He spoke of his work as 'a mere experiment'. 'It may', he said, 'have the advantages, but it is likewise attended with all the difficulties and dangers of *Novelty*.' And again, 'general criticism (by which he meant the older type) is as uninstructional as it is easy: *Shakespeare* deserves to be considered in detail;—a task hitherto unattempted.'

So he proceeds to a detailed examination of the character of Falstaff, endeavouring to prove that Falstaff was not a coward, and making a very good case of it. Whether or not we agree with him—and he tells us that he uses his argument as the vehicle of critical amusement—he sets us thinking about Falstaff as no one else had done, and—I might add—has done since. But his real subject is the genius of Shakespeare. 'Falstaff is the word only, Shakespeare is the theme.' At one point he forgets Falstaff altogether, to write in ecstasy about his creator:

He differs essentially from all other writers: Him we may profess rather to feel than to understand; and it is

'safer to say, on many occasions, that we are possessed by him, than that we possess him. And no wonder;—He scatters the seeds of things, the principles of character and action, with so cunning a hand, yet with so careless an air, and, master of our feelings, submits himself so little to our judgment, that every thing seems superior. We discern not his course, we see no connection of cause and effect, we are rapt in ignorant admiration, and claim no kindred with his abilities. All the incidents, all the parts, look like chance, whilst we feel and are sensible that the whole is design. His Characters not only act and speak in strict conformity to nature, but in strict relation to us; just so much is shewn as is requisite, just so much is impressed; he commands every passage to our heads and to our hearts, and moulds us as he pleases, and that with so much ease, that he never betrays his own exertions.

If you should say that this is a return to the old-fashioned general criticism, I do not know how you could be controverted. But if it is the old thing it is in a new manner, where cool judgement has yielded some ground to ecstasy. It is not 'un-instructive' and it is certainly not 'easy'.

Unfortunately, this is the only work of Morgann that has survived. His other critical writings remained in manuscript and were destroyed at his death; and this *Essay* would not have been published but for the encouragement of his friends. Strange to say, it was, to all appearances, unknown to Coleridge and Hazlitt. Had they known it,

they must have responded somehow to its fervid subtlety. It was not reprinted till the one had delivered his lectures, and the other had written his *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*.

With the new subject came the problems which never troubled the older critics, nor, we may assume, Shakespeare's contemporaries and generations of readers and playgoers. As surely as we differ about our acquaintances and their motives, Shakespeare's interpreters, once started on the analysis of character, were to differ, and differ voluminously. The Hamlet problem is older than *Wilhelm Meister* and Coleridge's Lectures. We see it taking shape in Richardson's book, where Hamlet's conduct is deduced as a necessity from his 'exquisite sense of virtue'; he is 'exquisitely sensible of moral beauty and deformity'. Steevens in 1773 had just gone out of his way to write a long and cross-grained note on Hamlet's 'immoral tendency', and in 1778 he added to it a remark made to him in conversation by Akenside the poet—Doctor Akenside—to the effect that 'the conduct of Hamlet was every way unnatural and indefensible, unless he were to be regarded as a young man whose intellects were in some degree impaired by his own misfortunes'. Henry Mackenzie in two essays in *The Mirror* in 1780 agreed with Richardson about Hamlet's sensibility, but differed somewhat

in his view of its effects, laying stress not so much on the observance of moral principles as on the weakness natural to a melancholy disposition. In 1783 Joseph Ritson replied to Steevens in his *Remarks on the Last Edition of Shakespeare*, and was followed by Thomas Davies in his *Dramatic Miscellanies*. In 1784 Richardson restated his views in 'Additional Observations' at the end of his second volume of essays on Shakespeare's characters. It is but a step from Richardson and Mackenzie to Goethe.

The publication of Whately's essay induced Richard Cumberland to add to his *Observer* in 1786 four papers on Macbeth and Richard III; and he followed them up with a paper on Falstaff. In the same year Mackenzie wrote two papers on Falstaff in his *Lounger*; and Richardson included Falstaff in his third volume of Shakespearian studies in 1788. Other papers will be found in the periodicals. Of all these critics Richardson was the most persistent. He developed a method which he exemplified with apparent ease and undoubted competence in essays that were first read as discourses to a society in the University of Glasgow. It was obviously a serious society, and these were the great days of serious societies in Scotland. His essays are not attractive reading now, but they have their place in the history of Shakespearian

criticism, and they cannot be neglected if we wish to understand its passage, through a somewhat flat stretch, from the eminence of the sixties and seventies of the century that was closing to the other eminence of the early years of the century that was to come. The best work was done at this time not by the critics, but by the scholars.

I suggest that Richardson was the first to read essays on Shakespeare—essays fit to be published, which may be read by us. We may venture to be more definite about public lectures. The following advertisement is found in *The Public Advertiser* for Wednesday, 19 January 1774:

SCHOOL OF SHAKESPEARE

IN the Apollo at the Devil Tavern, Temple bar, This Day will be read a Lecture, instructive and entertaining, on the First Part of the Play of KING HENRY the FOURTH. In which the Composition and Moral of the Piece will be elucidated, the principal Characters, particularly those of the King, the Prince of Wales, Hotspur, Sir John Falstaff and others will be illustrated, their favourite Speeches recited, and the most striking Excellencies and Defects in Stile and Sentiment exemplified.

Previously to which will be delivered an Introductory Address to the Auditors.

To begin precisely at Seven o'Clock. Admittance 2s.

This was the opening lecture of a course by William Kenrick, and we should not be rash in

saying that it was a bad lecture. But it is the first public lecture on Shakespeare of which we have record. It dealt with Falstaff, and it was delivered in the same year as Morgann wrote his *Essay*. A few years were to pass and Coleridge was lecturing at the Royal Institution, and to the London Philosophical Society. *The trip had been*

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